



## **MAMLECHET HACHAI: MITZVOT**

### **WHO CAN TELL US WHAT A “MITZVAH” IS?**

- What does the word actually mean in English?
- Do we have to do the commandments?
- What happens if we don't do them?
- So a commandment is not something we have to do, but rather something we are given as a *gift* that tells us the good and bad things that happen if we behave in certain ways?

### **THERE IS A MITZVAH OR COMMANDMENT IN THE TORAH THAT SAYS, IF WE SHOULD HAPPEN TO COME UPON A MOTHER BIRD SITTING UPON THE EGGS OF ITS YOUNG, WE MUST SEND THE MOTHER AWAY BEFORE WE TAKE THE EGGS.**

- Now, of course, we wouldn't take the eggs at all unless we needed them for food.
- But why do you think we are taught that it is right to send the mother away *before* we take the eggs?
- One of our great rabbis, Maimonides, said that we send the mother away because it is cruel to the mother to take away her eggs while she looks on and suffers.
- But another great rabbi, Nachmanides, said that the reason we are forbidden to take the eggs is not because of the mother's suffering but to teach us to show mercy to all living creatures.
- Who do you think was right?

### **THE VERSE IN THE TORAH THAT TEACHES US NOT TO TAKE THE EGGS IN THE SIGHT OF THE MOTHER ALSO SAYS THAT IF WE DO THE RIGHT THING, “IT WILL BE GOOD FOR YOU AND LENGTHEN YOUR DAYS.” (Deuteronomy 22:7)**

- So we're told that if we show mercy toward a mother bird, we'll live longer and happier lives.
- It's surprising that the same words—“lengthen your days”—are used in the Torah to describe what happens if we honor our mother and father, which the rabbis have said is the most difficult mitzvah or commandment of all. (Deuteronomy Rabbah 6:2 and Hullin 142a)

- There are many ways to understand why if we don't remove the eggs in the sight of the mother bird and we honor our parents, both "lengthen our days"—that is, help us live longer and happier lives.

**WHY DO YOU THINK THESE TWO MITZVOT OR COMMANDMENTS SHOULD LEAD TO THE SAME REWARD IF WE DO THEM?**

- Some of the rabbis taught that if we show mercy to the least of God's creatures, like a small bird, it would result in our showing mercy to one another—and, of course, we would live longer and happier lives if we did that.
- Other rabbis taught that Torah says the easiest of commandments, like letting the mother bird go before taking the eggs, are equal to the most difficult, like honoring our parents—so we should follow all the commandments, easy or hard, if we want to live longer and happier lives.



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